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Microaggressions and organizational diversity trainings

Abstract

Microaggressions are a ubiquitous part of human interactions and may be more prevalent in the workplace today than blatant discrimination. To address these incidents of subtle prejudice, diversity trainings that incorporate the topic of microaggressions will be necessary. To develop such a training, the literature on microaggressions and diversity trainings was reviewed, individuals who conduct diversity training were interviewed, and survey data was collected to determine how and how much microaggressions are being attended to in organizational diversity trainings. Based on this information, an example of a diversity training within an organization that addresses microaggressions was developed.

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MICROAGGRESSIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY TRAININGS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
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BY
STEPHANIE J. PRESTON
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	6
Racial Microaggressions.....	6
Gender Microaggressions	10
Sexual Orientation Microaggressions	11
Microaggressions in the Workplace.....	13
Diversity Trainings	14
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	21
METHOD	22
Interviews.....	22
Survey	27
EXAMPLE OF TRAINING	32
DISCUSSION.....	39
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIXES	
A. INTERVIEW	47
B. SURVEY	48

Abstract

Microaggressions are a ubiquitous part of human interactions and may be more prevalent in the workplace today than blatant discrimination. To address these incidents of subtle prejudice, diversity trainings that incorporate the topic of microaggressions will be necessary. To develop such a training, the literature on microaggressions and diversity trainings was reviewed, individuals who conduct diversity training were interviewed, and survey data was collected to determine how and how much microaggressions are being attended to in organizational diversity trainings. Based on this information, an example of a diversity training within an organization that addresses microaggressions was developed.

Introduction

Racism, sexism, and heterosexism¹ are very real problems in the United States today. However, apart from blunt, overt acts of hate, there also exists a more subtle, covert type of prejudice which may in fact be more prevalent due to its concealment. Due in part to the civil rights movement and resulting laws, there has been a decrease in overt displays of prejudice and a shift toward more covert, subtle, or ambiguous types of prejudice (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Currently, overt displays of prejudice and explicitly discriminatory remarks are not socially desirable. However, implicit prejudice still manifests in behaviors and evidence exists that the effects of subtle racial microaggressions may be more severe than the effects of their more overt counterparts (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Though subtle discrimination may seem less serious or harmful than blatant racism, it still has very serious psychological effects and contributes to disparities in healthcare, education, and employment. Acts of subtle prejudice have been labeled many things in the literature, including “aversive racism” (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), “modern racism” (McConahay, 1986), and “microaggressions” (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological consequences on the target person or group” (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007; p. 88). They are often subtle, stunning, and automatic and are experienced as invalidating and demeaning to individuals of color, women, people who do not present within the binary male/female gender system, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and transgender individuals. Microaggressions can be verbal, nonverbal,

¹ Note: I will be limiting my discussion to prejudice based on race/ethnicity, sex/gender, and sexual orientation. This is due to a dearth of literature considering other types of microaggressions, such as those based on age, ability, religion, and other sociodemographic variables.

environmental/visual or behavioral, and are often automatic and unconscious. They may be intentional or unintentional on the part of the person delivering them.

Sue and his colleagues (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, et al., 2007) have proposed that microaggressions can be divided into three categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Although the following descriptions refer to racial, gender, or sexual orientation related microaggressions, the taxonomy can be applied to all sorts of subtle acts of prejudice, including those based on religion, age, ability, and so on. Several studies have found that their explorations of microaggressions also fell into the categories of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (e.g., Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011). Sue (2010) states that microassaults are:

conscious, deliberate, and either subtle or explicit racial, gender, or sexual-orientation biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors. They are meant to attack the group identity of the person or to hurt/harm the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions (p. 28).

Examples of microassaults include displaying swastikas or a confederate flag, using derogatory terms such as “bitch”, “fag”, or “nigger”, or promoting a heterosexual employee over a more-qualified gay employee. Although very similar to and in some cases overlapping with “old-fashioned” racism, these behaviors tend to occur when the perpetrator feels a certain degree of anonymity, believes that those around him/her hold similar beliefs, or when he/she “loses control” such as when intoxicated or acutely angry.

Microinsults are unintentional behaviors or statements that communicate rudeness and insensitivity and demean the individual’s racial, gender, or sexual orientation identity.

Microinsults may convey a negative assumption or an insulting message about the individual's group (e.g., racial group, sexual orientation, or gender), though they may actually be motivated by positive intentions and the perpetrator is usually unconscious of the impact of his/her statement or behavior. An interviewer expressing (perhaps only nonverbally) surprise upon seeing a Black female candidate with superior credentials, teachers predominantly calling on male students, or using the word "gay" as a synonym for "stupid" or "bad" would all be examples of microinsults.

Microinvalidations invalidate, negate, or minimize the psychological experience, thoughts, feelings, and reality of individuals. Like microinsults, they are often unconscious or unintentional on the part of the perpetrator, and some are even meant to convey a message of acceptance. Examples include expressing an attitude of "colorblindness", asserting that the most qualified person will get the job (and the decision will have nothing to do with race/gender/sexual orientation), or stating that "we are all humans" and thus minimizing the real differences that exist for women, people of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. Often times, after facing a microaggression, if the targeted individual confronts the perpetrator or shares their experience with someone else, they are affronted with a microinvalidation when they are told that they are overreacting or reading too much into the incident. Statements like these minimize and invalidate the individual's reality and may even be experienced as blaming the victim.

Although most of these examples are in the context of interpersonal interactions, it is important to note that some of the most potent forms of microaggressions are nestled into a systemic or environmental context. An example of an environmental microaggression would be an absence of women or people of color occupying high-status positions in a company. This

absence sends the message to individuals of these groups that it is not possible for them to achieve high-status positions in the company. Another example might be a form asking patients to indicate gender as fitting into a binary system of either male or female, or asking for marital status and only giving options of single, divorced, or widowed. These forced-choice options neglect the reality of transgender individuals, as well as those in same-sex partnerships who may not be able to legally marry.

Aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) posits an explanation for microaggressions that focuses on the perpetrator's conscious and unconscious beliefs and motives more than on the interpersonal interaction or the target's experience thereof. As compared to more blatant, overt racism, aversive racism is a contemporary form of "subtle" racism that is theorized to arise from a conflict in white people's implicit and explicit biases. Aversive racists hold both egalitarian values and prejudices against people of color. On the one hand, they believe that everyone should be treated equally and that they are unprejudiced; on the other hand they may hold negative stereotypes of people of color and may feel uncomfortable during interracial interactions. For aversive racists, their beliefs in equality are conscious, whereas their anti-minority sentiments are unconscious. Because of this disparity, aversive racists may have more difficulty confronting their own biases and coming to terms with their role in perpetuating discrimination. Also because of this disparity, aversive racists may act in ways that are perceived negatively by people of color, whereas the aversive racist him/herself may feel that they interacted in a positive, friendly way (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). In line with current society's condemnation of overt racism, aversive racists find the idea that they might be prejudiced, well, aversive or repugnant! However, it would be nearly impossible to live in the United States today without being exposed to almost constant messages of racism, sexism,

heterosexism, and other prejudicial stereotypes. This inundation of biased messages is almost inevitably assimilated to some degree by those exposed to it, whether consciously or not.

These messages of devaluation and degradation do not stop once individuals walk through the door of their workplace; they continue, despite employers efforts to uphold equal employment regulations and to foster inclusive work environments. Since the passing of equal employment laws, employers have tried to combat discrimination in the workplace through policies, human resources departments, and diversity trainings. Policies may target hiring and promotion processes, sexual harassment in the workplace, or daily interactions. Human resources (HR) departments provide channels through which complaints can be made and are in place to ensure that anti-discrimination laws and regulations are upheld. Additionally, organizations may choose to implement diversity trainings, which may take on many different forms. They may consist of half-day workshops, ongoing courses, or integrating diversity issues into all forms of training and the daily workings of an organization. These trainings may be held to increase productivity (increase the company's "bottom line"), to avoid litigation, or to uphold an ethical standard. Although official policies may primarily target incidents of overt discrimination (or microassaults), diversity trainings may be better able to address the more pervasive, subtle acts of prejudice.

Literature Review

The following review will address the extant literature on racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggressions, including research and some proposed or theoretical explanations. In addition, I will address the topic of microaggressions in the workplace and current and proposed practices for improving cross-racial, -gender, and -sexual orientation interactions.

Racial Microaggressions

Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, and colleagues (2007) reviewed the literature including empirical studies, qualitative research, and personal narratives and proposed the previously discussed taxonomy of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. In addition, these researchers proposed nine distinct themes of racially motivated microaggressions: alien in one's own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness, criminality/assumption of criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class citizen status, and environmental invalidation.

There have been several studies of racial microaggressions, some of which lend support to the taxonomy of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, and some of which lend at least partial support to Sue et al.'s 2007 proposed themes. Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) conducted a qualitative analysis of two focus groups (13 participants total) of Black/African American, well-educated, 23- to 33-year-olds. They identified five domains regarding how participants spoke about microaggressions: incident, perception, reaction, interpretation, and consequence. The authors divided the interpretations into five categories labeled with the message that the microaggression communicated: "you do not belong", "you are abnormal", "you are intellectually inferior", "you are not trustworthy", and "you are all the

same”. These interpretations conveyed the message that the participants were not welcome in certain situations or society as a whole, that their way of doing things was wrong and that the “white way is the right way” (p.333), that they were assumed to be incompetent or prone to criminal behavior, or that any Black or African American person could speak for all Blacks/African Americans because all their experiences were the same. The consequences of experiencing these messages ranged from feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, forced compliance (into White culture) to a loss of integrity, and pressure to represent one’s group.

In a related study of the same data, Sue, Nadal, Capodilupo, Lin, Torino and colleagues (2008) found that six themes emerged from an analysis of the transcripts. These themes were an assumption of intellectual inferiority, second-class citizenship, an assumption of criminality, an assumption of inferior status, an assumed universality of the Black American experience, and the assumed superiority of white cultural values/communication styles. The authors differentiated the theme of second-class citizen and inferior status in that the former was a message that the participant was “‘less than’, unimportant, and invisible” (p. 337) and the latter was an assumption that the participant was uneducated, poor, and occupied a low-status position. These two studies lend support to Sue’s (2007) originally proposed categories of pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class citizen status, criminality/assumption of criminal status, and ascription of intelligence.

Further support for the nine proposed categories comes from Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2009), who conducted a similar qualitative analysis of focus group members reports of racial microaggressions, this time inviting Asian Americans to share their experiences. Themes that emerged from their two five-person focus groups were: alien in own land (i.e., the assumption that all Asian Americans are foreign or foreign-born), ascription of intelligence,

denial of racial reality (i.e., the denial of discrimination against Asian Americans), exoticization of Asian American women, invalidation of interethnic differences (e.g., differences between Korean Americans and Japanese Americans), pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second class citizenship, and invisibility. The authors noted that their sample only included one male, which may have led to a bias in themes representing more of the female Asian American experience than the male.

In an unfortunate recreation of the tendency to reduce issues of race into a Black-White dichotomy, research on racially motivated microaggressions is more sparse concerning other racial/ethnic categories. In a qualitative focus group study of Latina/o undergraduates (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009), researchers found that microaggressions occurred at the interpersonal level as well as the institutional level, and included racial jokes, rejections, assumed inferior intelligence, microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. Although the authors did not categorize the messages conveyed by the microaggressions in the same way that Sue and colleagues do, several similar themes were evident (e.g., ascription of intelligence). In addition, this study found that the Latina/o participants experienced rejection in their university setting and responded with community building and “critical navigation between multiple worlds” (p. 667).

Although similar studies of Native American individuals have not yet been conducted, there is evidence that racial microaggressions are perpetrated against Native Americans via the internet and weblogs. In one study (Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011) of reactions to the proposed discontinuation of a racialized mascot, researchers identified seven themes including advocating sociopolitical dominance, alleging oversensitivity, waging stereotype attacks, denying racism, employing the logics of elimination and replacement,

expressing adoration, and conveying grief. These themes were expressed by users of several weblogs and so it is important to keep in mind that the messages originated from the perpetrators of the microaggressions (as opposed to the targets, as in previously discussed research) and that this was an anonymous forum, which is likely to have influenced individuals' behaviors. The authors also noted that microaggressive comments fit into the proposed taxonomy of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.

In another study of internet-based comments about removing a Native American stereotyped sports mascot (Steinfeldt, Foltz, Kaladow, Carlson, Pagano, Benton, et al., 2010), researchers identified several themes and core ideas. They identified domains of surprise, power and privilege (exerted over others or perceived to be denied to the poster), trivialization, and denigration. They divided each of these domains into categories. Surprise included questions of "What? This is a problem?", "Why now?", and "Why us?" Power and privilege was divided into "We are the victims", expectations of gratitude, justification, and paternalism ("get over it"). The trivialization domain included messages of minimizing the issue, claiming pragmatic opposition, and perpetuating misinformation about Indians. Lastly, the researchers found the denigration category to include the categories of attacking credibility and legitimacy of dissenters, vilifying Indians, and punishing Indians if the nickname/logo was removed. Again, these themes reflect the messages written (anonymously) by individuals on a website in reaction to the proposed discontinuation of a racialized mascot and may not be the themes that would emerge were the targets of these comments interviewed.

In the research that has explored the targets of microaggressions' experiences and the themes that emerge from their reports, authors frequently noted the emotion that came up for participants, indicating the long lasting psychologically detrimental effects of racially motivated

microaggressions. In addition, several studies reported that participants made statements suggesting that “it was often easier to deal with a clearly overt act of bias than microaggressions that often created a ‘guessing game’” (Sue et al., 2009). Participants often described feelings of rage, belittlement, anger, frustration, alienation, and constant invalidation (Sue et al., 2009). Some tried to understand the motivations and intents behind the perpetrators’ behaviors (Sue et al., 2009), others tried to make perpetrators feel better or more comfortable about their presence (Sue et al., 2008), and some participants felt responsible for improving race relations (Yosso et al., 2009). Thankfully, participants also reported seeking out validation from others for their experiences, creating communities where they felt safe, and even feeling empowered. Despite the devastating negative effects, research has demonstrated that individuals also react in adaptive ways to microaggressions, increasing self-care, turning to spirituality, confronting perpetrators, and even organizing public responses, among other strategies (Hernandez, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010).

Gender Microaggressions

Like racial microaggressions, gender microaggressions are commonplace yet denigrating messages that are consciously or unconsciously delivered to women or individuals who do not ascribe to a binary gender system. They too may be categorized into microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations and their underlying messages further divided into themes. According to Sue (2010), gender microaggressions have been found to fall into the following themes: “sexual objectification, second-class citizenship, use of sexist language, assumptions of inferiority, denial of the reality of sexism, traditional gender role assumptions, invisibility, denial of individual sexism, and sexist jokes” (p. 169). Based on Sue and Capodilupo’s (2008) categories, I would

also suggest that the following categories may be underlying messages of gender microaggressions: the use of sexist language, the myth of meritocracy, pathologization of communication styles and the assumption of abnormality, particularly if we include prejudice and discrimination against transgender and androgynous individuals under the heading of gender microaggressions. A man refusing to do household chores because it's "women's work", teachers discouraging women from pursuing math- or science-related careers, or a supervisor continually referring to a female-to-male transgender employee as "she," all constitute gender microaggressions.

Although several studies of what has been labeled "subtle sexism" exist, little research has been conducted using the specific terminology of gender microaggressions. Women participating in a daily diary study reported experiencing one to two incidents of "impactful sexist incidents" every week (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) and the researchers found that these incidents could be categorized as traditional gender role prejudice and stereotyping, demeaning and derogatory comments and behaviors, and sexual objectification. The incidents tended to fall fairly evenly across the categories and tended to target women in general slightly more often than a specific woman or the participant herself.

Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

Unfortunately, overt acts of discrimination and violence are very much a reality for gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, and the number of hate crimes against them has increased in recent years (Latest Hate Crime Statistics, 2009). However, just as with other types of discrimination, heterosexism can also present in a more subtle ways and can come in the form of microassaults (e.g., hate speech), microinsults (e.g., "Don't ask, don't tell" policies), and

microinvalidations (e.g., telling someone that his/her bisexuality is “just a phase”). Themes of microaggressions against lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals include oversexualization, homophobia, heterosexist language/terminology, sinfulness, assumption of abnormality, denial of individual heterosexism, and endorsement of heteronormative culture/behaviors (Sue, 2010). The distinction between homophobia and heterosexism is an important one; the former refers to a fear of homosexuals, fear of being or becoming gay, and the idea that spending time with gays or lesbians may influence a straight person’s sexuality and make them gay. The latter speaks to a general view that heterosexuality is normal or better than other sexual orientations or that homosexuality or bisexuality is abnormal or wrong.

In a recent study of sexual orientation microaggressions in therapy (Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011), researchers identified seven themes from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) individuals’ focus group discussions. These themes were: (a) an assumption on the part of the therapist that sexual orientation was the cause of all presenting issues, (b) avoidance and minimizing of sexual orientation, (c) attempts to over-identify with LGBQ clients, (d) making stereotypical assumptions about LGBQ clients, (e) expressions of heteronormative bias, (f) assumption that LGBQ individuals need psychotherapeutic treatment, and (g) warnings about the dangers of identifying as LGBQ. They found that these messages were communicated through verbal, behavioral, and environmental channels and fit into the microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation taxonomy. Participants reported feeling “uncomfortable, confused, powerless, invisible, rejected, and forced or manipulated to comply with treatment. [They also] felt invalidated, un-affirmed, frustrated, and angry when their sexual orientation and issues pertaining to sexuality were ignored, avoided, overrepresented in treatment, or pathologized” (p. 217).

Microaggressions in the Workplace

As we spend such a considerable amount of our time working, it logically follows that people would experience microaggressions on the job as well as in everyday life. Despite the progress of anti-discrimination policies in the last few decades and a growing body of research that has been conducted on the experience of discrimination in the workplace, heterosexism, sexism, and racism in the workplace remain a problem in the United States today.

Only a handful of empirical studies have been conducted on the topic of subtle discrimination or prejudice in the workplace, but clearly it occurs and it is certainly harmful to both individuals and organizations. Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latino Americans all report higher levels of ethnic/racial bullying than White Americans and African Americans were significantly more likely to respond emotionally to bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Even when not labeled as racial discrimination or mistreatment, studies have found that people of color experience significantly higher rates of discrimination in the workplace than White people (Deitch et al., 2003), leading to the conclusion that this discrimination is related to race. Racial/ethnic discrimination was found to be associated with higher levels of emotional responses, action responses such as seeking redress, and counterproductive work behavior such as coming in late (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). In addition, people of color report lower levels of job satisfaction and, in the study by Deitch and colleagues, their experience of mistreatment was negatively related to emotional well-being and reported physical well-being. Similarly, other researchers (Smith & Ingram, 2004) have found that the experience of heterosexism in the workplace was significantly correlated with depression and psychological distress. In addition to individual-level consequences, employees who experience discrimination may have “less

confidence in the ability of their organizations to deal effectively with these types of incidents, particularly when the perpetrators [were] their supervisors” (Fox & Stallworth, 2005, p.453).

Racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggressions have a great effect on those who experience them, and it is no surprise that when these events happen at work, individuals’ work experiences are affected along with their psychological and often times physical well-being. As this review shows, these subtle forms of discrimination have been found to be related to depression, poor emotional and psychological well-being, lower job satisfaction, counterproductive work behavior, and diminished confidence in the organization. Not only do microaggressions seriously affect employees, but it appears they affect organizations as well. When employees react to prejudice with deviant workplace behavior, the productivity of the organization is decreased.

Diversity Trainings

The purpose and message of diversity trainings has changed throughout its short history (Anand & Winters, 2008). This history began with the purpose of compliance with legislation, then of “helping” women and people of color assimilate into the dominant culture. Sometime in the late 1980s, there was a realization that attention to diversity is necessary to retention and business survival, and in the next decade, diversity or “sensitivity” trainings, ranged from aggressive attempts to get white people to admit their guilt and responsibility to less antagonistic, even pleasant experiences. According to Anand and Winters, diversity trainings in the 21st century focus on building skills for optimizing interactions between different individuals. In other words, not just appreciating differences but actually utilizing them to the benefit of the business. There is more of an understanding of the need for ongoing learning and that it is not

just certain groups (e.g., white men or people of color) who can benefit from trainings, but rather that all employees need to be more adept at navigating cross-cultural interactions and relationships. These authors stress the importance of emphasizing diversity awareness and appreciation throughout the company, including having the support of CEOs, and not limiting discussions or trainings to one-day-per-year events. They also note and discuss the current difficulties in measuring effectiveness of diversity trainings and clarifying what the desired outcomes are.

Organizations have unique goals for diversity initiatives, making efficacy difficult to measure. However, if the goal is increased diversity within the workforce, longer term structural changes may be necessary (Kalev, Kelly, & Dobbin, 2006). Although the current project focuses on diversity trainings, which are generally conceived of as short-term interventions, several sources cite the need for more comprehensive organizational change in order to foster diversity awareness and behavior change in the workplace. Baytos and Delatte (1993) call for trainings to be positioned within broad diversity strategies and incorporated into core curricula. Wentling and Palma-Rivas (1999) interviewed experts in the field of diversity training, two thirds of whom agreed that a component of an effective diversity training is that it is included as part of the organizational strategic plan and 58% of whom stated that diversity training should be used in combination with other diversity initiatives.

In attempting to bridge the gap between social psychology theory and practice, Pendry, Driscoll, and Field (2007) reviewed some common methods and suggested ways to improve diversity trainings. Diversity trainings use a wide variety of methods, including didactic presentations, discussions, role playing, simulation, and more, and range from one hour classes and weekend workshops to ongoing courses throughout one's career and diversity management

programs embedded in the culture of the organization. These authors discuss different approaches by grouping them into the categories of informative/enlightenment, dissonance and guilt-inducing, social identity, and use of cognitive tasks to create awareness of own bias. Regarding the informative approach, the authors state that “information alone- even information that clearly demonstrates bias – is unlikely to be useful for correcting discriminatory behavior or prompting more socially equitable behavior” (p. 31). Typically, diversity trainings that confront historically advantaged groups with their privilege and biases are met with more anger and defensiveness than is productive, and members tend to leave with stronger in-group affiliations and out-group directed resentment. These types of trainings are more effective when they incorporate empathy and perspective-taking exercises.

Some experts (e.g., Lindsley, 1998) disagree with what Pendry et al., (2007) call “social identity approaches”, stating that the purpose of diversity trainings is not to minimize differences or communicate that “we’re all the same; we’re all humans”. Although the intent is inclusion, such messages could be very invalidating and in fact, could be experienced as microaggressions. However, highlighting intergroup differences can lead to defensiveness and increased cohesion of distinct sub-groups instead of cohesion of the whole. Pendry et al. point out the danger of discussing in-group privilege with individuals who are strongly identified with their group and state that such discussions only decrease prejudice in those who are already fairly experienced with diversity issues.

Using cognitive tasks (such as the Implicit Association Test; IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) can help diversity training participants gain a better understanding of their own thought processes and biases. However, such methods may be complex and require explanation to be interpreted correctly or understood in a way that promotes learning (Pendry,

Driscoll, & Field, 2007). These authors are optimistic that evidence exists that cognitive biases can be changed through awareness and retraining, though they caution that any diversity training must be imbedded in an organizational culture that values diversity and diversity awareness for trainings to have the intended effect.

Roberson, Kulik, and Tan (2013) provide an excellent overview of the existing literature on diversity trainings, though they note a lack of scholarly research. Regarding the preliminary step of needs assessment, these authors state that the analysis of the organization and its diversity-related problems has received the most research attention and has resulted in several models and tools to assist in the process. Research regarding the assessment of individuals (e.g., their diversity awareness/attitudes) has produced evidence that such assessment is useful, though infrequently implemented. Overall, the recommendation for assessment is a strong one.

Roberson et al. (2013) also review the use of two models of diversity training design: awareness first and social learning theory. The awareness first model is generally the most popular, with the underlying assumption being that people need to be aware of diversity and diversity issues before they can change behavior. Awareness may include increased knowledge of factual information about a group of people, about cognitive process such as biases or stereotypes, or facts about diversity within the organization. Increased awareness of these subjects, generally transferred through didactic teaching, is purported to affect behavior, decrease bias, and potentially increase empathy. Another target of awareness first trainings may be self-knowledge, such as “owning” one’s biases, which, according to Roberson et al., is supported by social psychology research to lead to better control over one’s actions. Oftentimes, self-awareness is increased in diversity trainings by confrontation methods, such as the IAT, Walking Through White Privilege (McIntosh, 1992), and Blue eyes/Brown eyes (Peters, 1987), the latter

two of which are simulations that provide experiential learning of privilege and disadvantage. The research evidence regarding such simulations is mixed, with several studies suggesting that these experiences increase anger, guilt, or aggression toward the out-group, especially for those White participants who most closely identify with being White. These techniques may be most effective with audiences that are more advanced in diversity knowledge or more motivated to change. Overall, the evidence that awareness programs alone (i.e., not as a first step in a comprehensive program) are effective in changing behavior or increasing skill is not encouraging.

Roberson et al. (2013) cite social learning theory as a second model, primarily useful for teaching skills in diversity trainings. In this model, key behaviors are determined and taught through practice and vicarious learning/modeling. It appears that, although the evidence for this method is supportive, the difficulty may lie in identifying target behaviors that are related to diversity competencies. The authors suggest that using the two approaches together may be best. They recommend providing skills after the potentially emotional awareness-raising phase to help participants feel more empowered.

Research regarding trainer and trainee characteristics has primarily focused on elements of trainers and trainees ethnic/racial background. Trainers of color are generally perceived as more knowledgeable and/or more effective than white trainers, unless the white trainers demonstrate knowledge of institutional discrimination (Lieberman, Block, & Koch, 2010). It has been suggested that what really matters is the match between trainer and trainees, and this has been supported in so much as it pertains to collectivist vs. individualistic cultures or when the training focuses on differences, rather than similarities (Holladay & Quinones, 2005). Regarding trainee demographics, the limited evidence (one study; Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2001)

suggests that trainees who are more advanced in their diversity training will benefit more from a homogenous group, whereas beginners may benefit from the array of perspectives available in a heterogeneous group.

How training is framed may have an effect on whether the training is effective. Research tends to support the idea that a broad definition of diversity results in better reaction from trainees than a more narrow definition (Rynes & Rosen, 1995) and when training is framed as an advanced assignment, rather than a remedial one (Holladay, Knight, Paige, & Quinones, 2003). In addition, making trainings mandatory may send the message that the topic is more important, thus increasing success rates (Rynes & Rosen, 1995). However, mandatory training for those with strong opposing beliefs may create increased backlash, negative attitudes, and stereotypic beliefs (e.g., Kaplan, 2006).

Efficacy of diversity trainings may be defined by individual changes in beliefs or attitudes, changes in workplace behavior or climate, and/or organizational effectiveness (e.g., increased profit). In general, diversity trainings are effective at changing individual levels of knowledge and awareness, both in the short- and long-term (Roberson et al., 2013). The research is somewhat more mixed when it comes to changes in attitudes, with some research suggesting positive change, some no change at all, and sometimes negative reactions. Evidence of skill building is also conflicting; however the research shows that those skills that are learned can be transferred to the workplace environment (Roberson et al., 2013). Although organizations would like to determine whether their investment in diversity trainings provided some return, it is difficult to isolate benefits from training alone. Several studies (e.g., Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006) have found that diversity trainings were not effective in increasing racial minority representation in the workforce and sometimes were associated with decreased retention or

hiring of certain minority groups (e.g., black women; Naff & Kellogg, 2003). Interestingly, one study (Hirsh & Kmec, 2009) found that diversity training for managers resulted in a decrease in discrimination charges whereas the training for employees resulted in an increase in discrimination charges. Presumably, this was due to increased sensitivity on the part of managers toward employees but increased awareness of employees' rights after they received the training. Lastly, there is some evidence that diversity trainings do not have an effect on sales performance (Ely, 2004). Roberson and colleagues (2013) caution that much of the organizational outcome research examines the presence or absence of diversity training and not the content, and they suggest that perhaps skill-based training or diversity trainings imbedded within larger diversity initiatives may be more effective than awareness training or diversity trainings alone.

Diversity trainings have evolved as new knowledge and research has become available and as general society's perspective on diversity has changed, as well as businesses' motivations for conducting these programs. However, there are many recommendations for future research on diversity trainings and few actual developments in the literature. In addition, it is unclear whether diversity trainings focus on more blatant racism and experiential exercises demonstrating overt discrimination than on the more subtle, covert racism that is so prevalent today.

Purpose of the Study

As demonstrated in the literature, microaggressions are real, commonplace experiences for people of certain groups or backgrounds. Any interpersonal interaction is an opportunity for microaggressions to occur, and the workplace is no exception. Diversity trainings have evolved from the traditional compliance model, however little to no research exists on the prevalence of diversity trainings or consultations that give attention to the reality of microaggressions. Diversity training is often recommended after an incident of overt discrimination and thus one could assume that the trainings themselves focus on overt forms of discrimination. However, because of the decrease in societal acceptability of overt racism, heterosexism, and sexism, microaggressions may be more likely to occur in the workplace than these overt incidents. Therefore, there is great need for diversity training or models of consultation that focus on microaggression-type interactions. The purpose of this study is to develop such training, based on extant literature as well as the knowledge of current practitioners.

Method

A thorough review of the literature was conducted as a foundation for the rest of the project. In addition, an examination of diversity trainings that are available to the general public was conducted. This included a search of the trainings available (via internet search engines and business websites), networking with other professionals, and contact with individuals who conduct diversity trainings. Individual interviews were conducted with local diversity trainers, in which I inquired about the process of developing a diversity training, outcome criteria, and the inclusion of the subject of microaggressions, among other things. To gather additional data from national sources, I developed a survey on the topic of diversity training development, implementation, and efficacy measurement, including a section on the inclusion of microaggressions. Relevant themes were discerned from qualitative data collected to determine areas deemed important for the development of a diversity training. Descriptive information (including frequency counts) was gained from survey data collected. This information served to supplement information gained from the previously mentioned qualitative analysis.

After reviewing the data collected, a program for a diversity training was developed using the information gathered and focusing on a fictional client organization. This program is intended as an outline of the process, could be used for implementation in an organization, and includes a discussion of microaggressions.

Interviews

Informed by the review of the literature, the principle researcher composed a series of questions to gather information on current diversity trainings, whether trainers include discussion of microaggressions, and how they develop their trainings (Appendix A). The researcher then

began contacting individuals known to conduct diversity training or organizational consulting with an emphasis on diversity. Names were collected from previous experiences, and asking those who were contacted for referrals. Although more than 10 trainers were contacted, only three agreed to be interviewed. The individuals interviewed were all male, came from divergent educational backgrounds, were of various ethnicities and abilities, and had different areas of expertise and thus, different practices in terms of their work with organizations. Regarding whether or not these three professionals addressed microaggressions in their work, most said yes, at some level. One described it as the “core” of his work, and one said he generally does not address microaggressions in his first meeting with an audience as it is too complex and people tend to be too defensive. The interviews lasted from approximately an hour to an hour and a half and were conducted at the trainers’ places of work. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the principle researcher. Then, the researcher ascertained main points from the interviews and divided these main points into themes. The themes are Language, Types of Work, Preparation, In Training-General and In Training-Specific.

Language. Interview subjects discussed different words they use and potential meanings or inferences behind particular words. The term “diversity training” sparked conversation about the history of such trainings, whether the work was, in fact, ‘training’ (see below in Types of Work), and the definition of diversity.

Several of the interview subjects talked about or referred to the history of diversity training being one of “compliance” training, or mandating that employees attend “sensitivity training” where, as one interviewee put it, a trainer would “beat up on the white guys”. They noted that consultation and training has evolved from this mindset; however it is still important

to recognize the history of the field and what some participants' expectations may be coming into a diversity training.

Additionally, the individuals interviewed discussed different definitions of diversity, such as including white men, and recognizing that we all have privilege and power in some situations or may have privilege within an area of disadvantage (e.g., certain disabilities being more privileged than others, lighter skin within some Black/African American communities).

Lastly, the interviewees talked about the possible effects of language and providing definitions. At least one mentioned that part of the training might be giving definitions of diversity, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and educating the audience about these topics. Additionally, the interview subjects encouraged paying attention to the language used and possible reactions of audience members. For example, using the term "microaggression" may elicit defensiveness on the part of those who are accused of perpetrating microaggressions, as they do not experience themselves as aggressive or even intending to offend.

Types of Work. Interview subjects described the differences between the many different types of work that they do.

The interviewees emphasized the difference between long-term organizational consulting and short-term "one and done" trainings or workshops, the latter being far less effective at creating lasting change. Interviewees also discussed the difference between training, which is teaching skills and tools, and such applications as organizational consultation or deep immersion learning laboratories, etc., which enable individuals and organizations to increase awareness, determine areas of growth, and/or work toward systematic change. Interviewees described some of the different types of work they have done, including three-hour workshops, executive coaching, long-term organizational consulting, exit interviews, and speaking engagements.

Preparation. The interview subjects all stressed the importance of preparation and laying groundwork for a successful training. They talked about the importance of knowing the subject matter, and of reading journals, newspapers, current events, and staying current by consulting with others who do the work. They emphasized the importance of preparatory work within the organization, including advertising how training can help the “bottom line”, getting support and participation from leaders in the organization, knowing the organization’s politics, and determining the need within the organization and tailoring the training or consultation to that need. They also recommended knowing the demographic make-up of the audience and taking this into consideration when developing the training.

Lastly, interviewees emphasized the importance of doing “your own work”, meaning that the facilitator must know his or her own culture, biases, areas of privilege, and sensitivities, for these will all be addressed in the training. Additionally, all those interviewed recommended selecting a competent facilitator, and hopefully one who has complementary knowledge or experience, and/or one who differs on some demographic variables so as to reach as many participants as possible. (“People are more open to hearing things from people who look like them.”) One interview subject emphasized that a facilitator does not need to have read every book or know everything to begin leading trainings; he stated it was important to be willing to jump in and make mistakes, as we will forever be learning and could never do the work if we had to be total experts first.

In Training-General. Generally, interviewees encouraged creating safety in a training. They try to help people understand their own cultures, statuses, and perspective in order to understand another’s. They promoted the goal of raising awareness of assumptions and enabling participants to see that their reality may differ from the reality of their co-workers.

Additionally, the individuals interviewed cautioned that this work is very difficult and audience members will often be defensive and resistant. One suggested that if members were not providing negative feedback, then the training may not have gotten them thinking deeply enough. The interviewees all warned that people in trainings will challenge the facilitator and his/her authority, push his/her “buttons” and attack his/her sensitivities, and facilitators will inevitably be offended themselves at some point.

Lastly, interview participants agreed about the importance of improvisation and using the in-the-moment interactions. They talked about being flexible, being willing to give up any agenda in order to do the work that presents itself and to address microaggressions as they are perpetrated in the training.

In Training-Specific. Specific suggestions of techniques to incorporate into a training included methods of creating a safe space and working with resistance, as well as different presentation styles and considerations. All interviewees agreed that a setting wherein people feel safe to speak is imperative and that this is done in part during the preparation phase of getting the upper levels of the organization involved. The interviewees emphasized collaborating on group agreements and otherwise creating safety, trust, and as much confidentiality as possible. This may include a discussion of “you get what you put in” and/or stating that participants are welcome to not speak if they so choose; speaking is not forced or required. One interviewee suggested asking participants about their hopes and fears and then listening to what they are saying “behind the words”. He said that how people respond to that question will tell you how serious they are about working or how defensive they are. In a related vein, interviewees talked about addressing people’s fears about participating, about “breaking rank” or betraying their

group, and about making mistakes. One suggested tying participation and involvement in the training back to self-interest and discussing the loss to everyone of continuing the status quo.

One particular technique the interviewees recommended was that the facilitator/trainer speak about her own experience of microaggressions and encourage participants do the same, particularly focusing on microaggressions that have occurred within the workplace. Interviewees reminded the researcher that the targets of microaggressions may not fall upon the typical definition of culture/diversity, but rather diverse organizational culture, such as the culture of the engineers as opposed to the human resources department culture.

Lastly, interviewees gave specific suggestions about presentation style, particularly taking into consideration the diversity of learning styles (i.e., auditory, visual, kinesthetic) and using various media and teaching methods. They mentioned video, large and small group discussions, one-on-one conversations with a neighbor, getting people up on stage to speak, thought exercises or experiential exercises, and recommended varying teaching methods to reach the largest audience.

Survey

After the interview phase, the principle investigator created a survey (Appendix B) using SurveyGizmo.com to collect data on whether or not diversity trainers/consultants were including a discussion of microaggressions in their work and if they were, how. The survey was created using data collected from the interviews, in ways such as attention to language pointed out by interview subjects and incorporating some of the interview subjects' answers into the survey answer options. The survey was emailed to individuals known by the researcher to have experience conducting diversity trainings or consultations with the request that it be forwarded

on to others who qualified. In addition, the survey was sent to Division 45 of the American Psychological Association (APA). The inclusion criterion was that the individual had conducted at least one diversity training or multicultural consultation of any type within an organization. A total of 23 people responded to the survey, though one person stated he/she had not yet conducted any sort of diversity training.

No identifying information was collected from survey participants, nor was there any verification of their having conducted diversity trainings and what types had been conducted. Additionally, despite stated inclusion criteria, some survey participants did not fit the stated inclusion/exclusion criteria or interpreted it differently than the researcher intended (i.e., a professor who teaches about genocide responded). Additionally, it is reasonable to guess that most respondents were psychologists, since a majority of the responses came in after emailing the survey link to the APA Division 45 listserv. Therefore, this information should not be generalized to diversity trainers with other educational backgrounds, who may make up a large percentage of the individuals conducting such trainings in organizations.

Survey results. Over 80% (82.6%) of respondents knew the term ‘microaggressions’ (19 out of 23) and 60.9% (14) reported that they include discussion of microaggressions in their trainings/consultation. Four participants responded that they do not address microaggressions in their work, and five said they sometimes do. When those who responded “sometimes” were asked to estimate what percent of the time they did address microaggressions, respondents said, 2, 10, 20% and “depends on the topic of the training and how much time I have”.

When asked the reason for not addressing microaggressions, one respondent endorsed “I don’t know how”, one selected the option “too subtle a concept”, and three said “other”. Those who said “other” were asked to elaborate; one replied that he/she *does* address microaggressions

and so the question did not apply (there was an option for this), one replied that he/she does not think of doing it, and the last replied that he/she focuses on “extraordinary evil”, such as genocide, in his/her courses.

The next question inquired about what methods respondents use in their trainings to address microaggressions. Eight said they used experiential exercises, seven said cognitive exercises, 13 said didactic/lecture, 15 said discussion, and five said “other.” Another five responded that they do not address microaggressions and thus this question did not apply to them.

To determine how participants went about the process of consultation, questions were asked about assessment and intervention methods used. Eight responded that they engaged in long-term organizational consultation whereas 16 that they engaged in short-term (i.e., days or hours) trainings. Eight participants reported conducting their own assessment of the organization’s problem and nine conducted some type of evaluation after the intervention. Eight also reported engaging in executive coaching, 17 in didactic presentation of information, and nine selected “other”. Those who selected “other” led seminars for doctoral students, taught classes, provided consultation to key members, and distributed handouts.

Participants generally cited formal or informal trainings, workshops, and education (specifically graduate education) as their primary methods of developing their diversity training programs. Several suggested reading (specifically reading *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* [Sue, 2010]), consulting with colleagues, co-leading with an expert, and consulting with experts. Some also mentioned getting experience, including life experience, and one cited referencing the APA standards.

The responses to two similar questions (“Any tips for someone interested in developing an organizational diversity training” and “Is there anything else you think I should know about incorporating a discussion of microaggressions into organizational diversity trainings?”) were combined, as they elicited very similar responses. These responses were then analyzed for themes and the following emerged: *Preparatory Work*, *In The Training*, *Organizational Context*, and *Thick Skin/Do Your Own Work*.

Advice that fell into the *Preparatory Work* category included reading on the topic, (e.g. books by D.W. Sue), and studying multiple models. Respondents also suggested talking with people in the field and people who are different. Additionally, it was recommended by one participant to consider microaggressions within the protocol and by another to intentionally put microaggressions into the presentation and then “catch yourself doing them, and use those as examples”.

In the Training advice ranged from suggesting providing food and taking a person-centered, playful approach to including white identity development and self-disclosure of struggles and learning experiences. Several respondents emphasized experiential exercises, eliciting audience members’ common experiences of being demeaned or insulted, and pausing to address microaggressions as they occur in the training. Lastly, a few participants recommended approaching the audience in a way that is non-threatening, by thinking about how to have them feel “joined and supported in change, rather than accused of something”. It was noted that targeting people or making them feel they are being called racist, sexist, or homophobic will not facilitate change or increased awareness.

In terms of the *Organizational Context*, survey respondents emphasized the importance of the participation and “buy in” of the organization and especially leaders in the organization.

One stated that if the leaders do not think it is important, no one will. Additionally, they echoed the literature in stating that long-term organizational consultation and collaboration is most effective and that individuals may not open up readily in a one-time training workshop. Lastly, one participant noted that diversity in an organization may be different than ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation; for example, microaggressions may be committed against artistic people in an engineering organization.

Similar to advice given in the interview phase, survey respondents cautioned that conducting organizational diversity trainings is emotionally draining work (the *Thick Skin/Do Your Own Work* category). They recommended having a “thick skin”, not taking comments personally or wearing feelings on your sleeve. Comments included being prepared to face resistance, persevering, and not getting discouraged despite it all. Lastly, participants recommended that a facilitator/trainer know his/her own biases and prejudices.

This data collection (both interviews and surveys) spanned a variety of experiences, perspectives, and knowledge. Diversity trainers ranged in their definitions of diversity, the types of work they do (consultation vs. training), and the approaches they use within training sessions. However, a couple of themes emerged again and again: commitment from the organization is vital and knowing one’s own biases, culture, and “buttons” is essential. Despite minimal research on the topic, most respondents were aware of the concept of microaggressions and many include it in their work. This suggests a need for piloted trainings with a specific emphasis on subtle prejudice and increased dissemination of effective techniques or approaches to planning and conducting diversity consultation.

An Example of a Diversity Training Program which Attends to Microaggression

I will be using Edgar Schein's model of process consultation as a guide in this hypothetical situation for several reasons. The first is that I believe it is particularly applicable to situations involving issues of intercultural conflict and/or microaggressions because of the emphasis on the client generating its own solutions and respect for client autonomy. Secondly, the emphasis on thorough assessment is important, and borne out in the literature (Roberson, Kulik, & Tan, 2013; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1999). Thirdly, due to my training and background in psychology, I believe that it is better to "teach a person to fish"; in other words, inviting the client organization to be a part of the diagnosis and intervention development process will increase the client's ability to solve future problems.

Edgar Schein developed a model he called process consultation, which is in contrast to "purchase of expertise" and "doctor patient" models that focus on the content of organizational problems (Schein, 1978). Process consultation is a more collaborative model that enables the consultant and client organization to work together to determine the issues and solutions instead of placing responsibility and expertise on the outside consultant. This enables the client organization to learn the process of problem solving so as to be better able to solve future issues as they arise. Schein states that "the core of this model is the assumption that for many kinds of problems that clients face, the *only* way to locate a workable solution, one that the client will accept and implement, is to involve the client in the diagnosis of the problem and the generating of that solution" (p. 342). In addition, Schein delineates the following assumptions that underlie this model and must be met for it to be successful:

1. That the nature of the problem is such that the client not only needs help in making an initial diagnosis but would benefit from participation in the process of making that

diagnosis... 2. That the client has constructive intent and some problem-solving ability...

3. That the client is ultimately the only one who knows what form of solution or intervention will work in his or her situation... 4. That if the client selects and implements his or her own solution, the client's problem-solving skills for future problems will increase. (p. 342)

Specifically relevant to the topic of diversity consultation and training, Schein states that, referring to the first assumption, "most problems that ... involve one or more other persons, that have group or organizational components, that involve values, attitudes, assumptions, and cultural elements... fall into this category" (p.342). Therefore, this model of consultation is particularly useful with organizations facing diversity-related conflicts.

The following is a hypothetical example of process consultation with a fictional client. I will follow Schein's (1988) model of process consultation and the proposed phases thereof, which are:

- initial contact and screening
- entry and preliminary assessment
- contracting
- assessment
- feedback and identification of issues of concern
- goal setting
- intervention (s)
- evaluation
- termination

The client organization is an upscale restaurant in the Pacific Northwest. The restaurant owner and manager calls me, speaking of customers who complain of poor service and he suspects it is due to staff not working together (initial contact and screening.) I recommend an exploratory meeting with contact person and a few other key individuals- a few servers, a dishwasher/busser, a kitchen employee, perhaps a regular customer (entry and preliminary

assessment). In the meeting, it becomes clear that there are issues among the staff and management, however at the end of the hour it is still unclear exactly from where these issues stem. It appears that discord and low morale are negatively impacting the way the staff interact with one another, thereby reducing their ability to give customers positive experiences. I hear examples of servers asking bussers to do things and bussers not responding, of hostesses not fulfilling drink orders, and of the management regularly miscommunicating with the kitchen. I decide that the situation appears amenable to process consultation and draft a contract (contracting). During the drafting period, I speak with the restaurant owner about the need for his involvement and dedication to this process, as well as the possibility of getting difficult feedback. We also discuss the importance of both soliciting feedback from all stakeholders and of implementing changes based on the feedback given; he agrees.

The first step is further inquiry and data collection to better define the issue (assessment). I observe an evening at the restaurant, noting styles of communication, and request that the manager alert me to any particular incidents. From this observation, it becomes clear that certain employees treat one another more favorably, and that there are some rivalries and employees who minimize their contact with one another. I conduct focus groups with employees, management, and the owner and distribute a survey to employees and a selection of recent customers. Based on this inquiry, it becomes clear that the staff are somewhat divided along lines of ethnicity, in that the Hispanic employees get along and the White and Asian American employees group together, but these two groups do not mingle.

The next step is for me to present this information back to the staff, management, and owners (feedback and identification of issues of concern). I assemble all the data collected into a report and presentation, and present it at a staff meeting. It appears that, although not being

named as such, many of the employees are experiencing and perpetrating microaggressions against other employees, causing the work atmosphere to be tense, defensive, and cliquish. Due to this discovery (and a limited budget), the staff, owner and I agree that a half-day diversity training may be an appropriate intervention. I then collaborate with the employees about reasonable goals for the intervention (goal setting). An example may be to “increase awareness of what microaggressions are and of how we may inadvertently perpetrate them at work”. I am also able to create a questionnaire based on this goal in order to assess a baseline level of awareness and levels of awareness post-intervention. The questionnaire is given to participants as they enter the training and again after they exit. We also conduct follow-up evaluations in the form of conversations with staff and management at a prescribed period after the training (evaluation). Based on the post-intervention evaluations, we can determine the efficacy of the training and whether additional consultation is needed. If my services are no longer needed, the project is complete (termination).

Training (intervention). A certain amount of preparation must be done before the training itself, and would include physical space set up and information about the audience. Additionally, an appropriate co-facilitator would be selected, with an attempt to find someone who has considerable experience conducting such trainings and who differs from me on important gender, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation variables.

Regarding physical space preparation, a room must be reserved and a time scheduled, preferably a room that is convenient (perhaps a banquet room in the restaurant) and a time that works well for the majority of the employees (e.g., Tuesday morning, when fewest employees are working). It will also be important to procure any multimedia equipment beforehand, ensure

there are adequate chairs, and determine whether tables or desks of some sort are available. I would visit the space prior to the training to arrange chairs and tables as needed.

It would be very important to have prior knowledge of the audience. Within this client organization, there are 32 individual employees; I would request a breakdown of ethnicity and gender and the percentage of attendees belonging to each category. I also want to know the number of years employed by this company, as well as descriptive statistics (i.e., range, mean/median/mode) and a breakdown of how many managers and owners will be present, as well as the numbers of both front and back of house employees, event planners, receptionists, valets, etc.

As participants arrive, they are given a pre-test on their knowledge of microaggressions and subtle prejudice, particularly as it relates to their work environment. An introduction to the agenda for the day would be outlined, as well as general ground rules about trust, participation (not required but “you get out what you put in”). Then, participants would be asked about their hopes and fears for the training. I would also encourage them to think about what they can get out of the training, whether that is better tips from customers, a better work environment, personal growth, etc.

To get the conversation about culture started, I would ask participants to form small groups of three to five and have them discuss their cultures. I would prompt them with questions such as, “What is culture?”, “What is your culture?”, and “What are some attributes of your workplace culture?” After discussing in small groups, I would ask them to return to the larger group and discuss what came up in the small groups. I may add a question about how one’s personal culture and the workplace culture converge or conflict.

Before moving into the topic of microaggressions, it would be important to discuss the concept of ‘intention vs. impact’ and that of many different subjective versions of reality. In other words, two people witnessing the same event may have very different perceptions of what happened. Additionally, one person’s intention may be good, and the impact on another person may be harmful. These can both exist at the same time and it is not about arguing over whose perspective is the correct one; we must be able to hold both as valid.

Next, I would show a video clip introducing the concept of microaggressions. A great example would be D.W. Sue’s publicly available “Microaggressions in Every Day Life”. Following the clip, I would invite any initial reactions and thoughts about subtle prejudice. I may provide a visual definition of microaggressions, including the levels of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, as well as giving examples of environmental, systemic, and interpersonal microaggressions.

In order to engage kinesthetic learners and invigorate the audience, I may ask participants to stand in a circle and walk into the middle if they have experienced a certain type of microaggression. I would continue the conversation by inviting participants to share examples of microaggressions they have experienced generally in their lives and then more specifically, at work.

During these exercises, I would attend to microaggressions that may happen during the process, such as the invalidation of experience (e.g., “Oh you’re just being too sensitive” or “I’m sure that didn’t happen because of your race/sexual orientation/gender”). These are excellent in-the-moment opportunities for learning.

To conclude the training, I would again ask for a check-out from participants regarding any emotions that have come up during the work or important “take away” lessons. I may ask

about ideas for how this learning can be incorporated at work and in life, such as being open to feedback if microaggressions occur or continuing discussions started today.

As participants leave, they would be given an exit questionnaire to assess learning, satisfaction, and to elicit feedback for the facilitators (evaluation phase). As mentioned, based on this questionnaire and follow-up meetings with the management, we either decide that our objectives have been achieved and our relationship ends (termination phase) or we prepare for further consultation and return to the contracting and assessment phase.

Discussion

Microaggressions are still rarely addressed in diversity trainings, despite being a prevalent experience with serious consequences. Through this project, I have attempted to add to the existing knowledge about diversity trainings and consultations. However, several limitations existed and must be noted. First, the small sample sizes in both the interviews and survey phases of data collection plus the probability that most survey respondents were psychologists or had psychological training suggests that these samples may not be generalizable to the field of individuals conducting diversity trainings and consultations as a whole. Secondly, there are limitations to the program that resulted from the information collection. The first of these is that the hypothetical client organization and its presenting problem were simplified to lend itself well to short-term diversity training. Were this a real world situation, the issue would likely be far more complex and would thus require a more in-depth assessment and additional longer-term consultation and organizational change apart from a half-day training. Lastly, as both previous research and information gathered in this project suggest, trainings must be tailored to the individual needs of the organization and its members; therefore, this training is only one example and future trainings would need to be altered to fit the specifics of the audience members and their level of diversity awareness.

Despite these limitations, several areas of future research are possible that may stem from this preliminary study. More extensive research could be conducted on the prevalence of diversity training and consultation that addresses microaggressions in the workplace and studies determining their efficacy could greatly benefit the field. Efficacy may be measured in terms of the organization's individual goals, behavior change/skill implementation and knowledge transfer, or retention rates, customer service ratings, or even return on investment. The possible

outcome criteria are nearly endless, making outcome research difficult but still potentially useful to organizations and consultants. Lastly, there is very little empirically-based information available for prospective diversity trainers despite numerous trainings being regularly conducted across the globe. Dissemination of information between consultants could benefit all involved.

Microaggressions occur in even the most progressive workplace, demonstrating a need for training, education, awareness-raising, and skills-based trainings that address not only blatant sexism, heterosexism, and racism, but also the more subtle prejudicial acts. This project has summarized the literature, added to it by way of interview and survey data, and synthesized the information to produce an example of process consultation that resulted in a diversity training geared toward subtle prejudice and microaggressions. Such a training can benefit an organization immensely by affecting not only profitability, but also by addressing the greater social justice issue at hand of a comfortable, inclusive workplace environment.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview of Diversity Trainers

1. Please tell me about the diversity training(s) you have conducted.
2. Have you heard the term microaggressions? What is your understanding of the definition of microaggressions?*
3. Do you include a discussion of microaggressions or subtle prejudices in your diversity training?
 - If so, in what way? (For example, experiential exercises, cognitive exercises, didactic information, etc.)
 - If not, why not?
4. Please tell me about your experience of discussing microaggressions in organizational diversity trainings. (Further prompting: could you please tell me about a time this went well/badly?)
5. How did you develop your program?
6. Are your diversity trainings time-limited programs (workshops) or ongoing diversity trainings that are imbedded in the organization?
7. Is there anything else you think I should know about incorporating a discussion of microaggressions into organizational diversity trainings?

* If they have not heard of microaggressions, I will give the following definition:

Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological consequences on the target person or group” (Sue, Bucci, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). They are often subtle, stunning, and automatic and are experienced as invalidating and demeaning to individuals of color, women, people who do not present within the binary male/female gender system, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and transgender individuals. Microaggressions can be verbal, nonverbal, environmental/visual or behavioral, are often automatic and unconscious, and may be intentional or unintentional on the part of the person delivering them.

Follow up questions: Are you aware of other people doing this work whom I could interview? Could you provide contact information?

Appendix B

Survey – hosted by SurveyGizmo.com

Microaggressions and Organizational Diversity Trainings

Page One

You are invited to participate in a research study on the inclusion of a discussion of microaggressions in organizational diversity trainings. The project has been approved by the Pacific University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and will be completed by Stephanie Preston, M.S., with the help of Jon Frew, Ph.D. and Shawn Davis, Ph.D. The study will take place via the internet and the results will be used to inform the current knowledge about diversity trainings, as well as to develop a program of diversity consultation/training.

It is your right to discontinue the interview at any time, or to decline to answer any questions or discuss any particular topic. In the event that you do feel emotional distress resulting from this interview, please notify the researcher as soon as possible.

There is no direct benefit to you for participating.

All results will be kept in a confidential and private manner. No identifying information will be collected and results will be kept on a password protected computer, with only the researchers having access to the password.

During your participation in this project it is important to understand that you are not a Pacific University clinic patient or client, nor will you be receiving complete mental health care as a result of your participation in this study. If you are injured during your participation in this study and it is not due to negligence by Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the research, you should not expect to receive compensation or medical care from Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the study.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Pacific University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw after beginning the study, the data you provided prior to withdrawal will be excluded from the study, unless you consent to its use.

The researcher(s) will be happy to answer any questions you may have at any time during the course of the study. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, please call Pacific University's Institutional Review Board, at (503) 352-1478 to discuss your questions or concerns further. If you become injured in some way and feel it is related to your participation in this study, please contact the investigators and/or the IRB office. All concerns and questions will be kept in confidence.

New Page

1. Do you know what the term 'microaggressions' means?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I've heard it before but couldn't define it
- ☐ Unsure

New Page

Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological consequences on the target person or group” (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). They are often subtle, stunning, and automatic and are experienced as invalidating and demeaning to individuals of color, women, people who do not present within the binary male/female gender system, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and transgender individuals. Microaggressions can be verbal, nonverbal, environmental/visual or behavioral, are often automatic and unconscious, and may be intentional or unintentional on the part of the person delivering them.

2. Regarding the above definition...

- ☐ Yes, that sounds about right.
- ☐ Interesting; I'm not familiar with this term/haven't heard of this phenomenon before.
- ☐ Oh of course - I understand that concept but do not use the term "microaggressions". If so, what term do you use/prefer?
- ☐ Other response

3. Do you include a discussion of microaggressions or subtle prejudices in your diversity training? (If you answer 'sometimes,' please estimate the percentage of diversity trainings in which you would address microaggressions in some way.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Sometimes

4. If you do address microaggressions, what methods do you use? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ I do not address microaggressions/does not apply
- ☐ Experiential exercises (e.g., role play)
- ☐ Cognitive exercises (e.g., imagination)
- ☐ Didactic/lecture
- ☐ Discussion
- ☐ Other

5. If you do NOT address microaggressions or subtle prejudice in your trainings/consultation, why not?

- ☐ I do address microaggressions/this question does not apply to me
- ☐ Not enough time
- ☐ Not getting paid to do that/Organization wants me to focus on more blatant discrimination
- ☐ Too subtle a concept
- ☐ I don't know how
- ☐ I would feel uncomfortable or I believe it would make the audience too uncomfortable
- ☐ I often just forget

☐ Other

6. Please tell me about your experience of discussing microaggressions in organizational diversity trainings and/or tell me about a time this went well or badly.

[Open response]

7. How did you develop your diversity training? Please include things such as formal education, trainings, degrees obtained, informal training (e.g., reading articles, books) as well as how you went about writing the outline/skeleton of your program, or other steps you take to prepare a training.

[Open response]

8. Any tips for someone interested in developing an organizational diversity training?

[Open response]

9. Which of the following do you conduct to address cultural issues in organizations?

- ☐ Long-term organizational consultation
- ☐ Short-term (i.e., days or hours) diversity/inclusion/intercommunication training
- ☐ My own assessment of the organization's problem
- ☐ Evaluation after the intervention
- ☐ Executive coaching
- ☐ Didactic presentation of information
- ☐ Other

10. Is there anything else you think I should know about incorporating a discussion of microaggressions into organizational diversity trainings?

[Open response]

11. If you know of any listservs or individuals who conduct diversity trainings and might be willing to fill out my survey, please include their emails here.

[Open response]

Thank You!

Thank you for taking my survey. Contact spreston@pacificu.edu with questions, comments, or feedback.

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